

## **Asunder · conference presentation**

JOHNSON, Esther <<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8884-4192>>

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2016 commemorative project for the centenary of the Battle of the Somme, with a particular focus on the North East

Primarily funded by:  
**14-18 NOW** WW1 Centenary Art Commissions across the UK and  
 Sunderland Cultural Partnership



**ASUNDER**  
a film by Esther Johnson

ASUNDER tells the story of what happened to an English town during the First World War, with almost all of its men fighting abroad and its women and children left behind. The North East was in the front line, thanks to its shipyards and munitions factories.

Using archive and contemporary footage and audio, ASUNDER collages the stories of people from Tyne-side and Wear-side to uncover what life was like on the home front, with bombs falling on Britain for the first time, conscientious objectors sentenced to death, and women working as doctors, train conductors, and footballers. The narrative moves from an Edwardian golden era, in which sport grew in popularity and aircraft and cars pointed to a bright new future, to a war that horrifically reversed this progress. In the Battle of the Somme, British, French and German armies fought one of the most traumatic battles in military history. Over the course of just four months, more than one million soldiers were captured, wounded or killed in a confrontation of unimaginable horror.

directed by Esther Johnson  
 text by Bob Stanley  
 narrated by Kate Asher and Alan Armstrong  
 music composed by Field Music and Warm Digits  
 performed with Royal Northern Sinfonia and The Cornshed Sisters  
 produced by Esther Johnson and Bob Stanley  
 www.asunder1916.uk  
 @1916asunder

Co-commissioned by Sunderland Cultural Partnership and 14-18 NOW WW1 Centenary Art Commissions, supported by the Heritage Lottery through Arts Council England and the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Sunderland Business Improvement District, Culture Bridge North East and the James Watt Trust.

## PROJECT AIMS

- to uncover untold stories of WW1 with a focus on Sunderland and the North East of England
- to experiment with mixing archive with contemporary footage shot especially for the film
- to create a narrative that weaves oral history testimonies, diary entries and memoirs from those that lived through WW1 with newspaper stories published in 1914-18 editions of the *Sunderland Daily Echo* and *Shipping Gazette*
- to collaborate with musicians from the North East to create an original soundtrack to be performed live at the premiere



# SOUNDSCAPE

[illegible]

# FILM CHARACTERS

individuals from the North East

**Margaret Holmes**

**Norman Gaudie**

**Bella Reay**

**Garnet Wolsey Fyfe**

**Arthur Linfoot**

**George Thompson**

**Robert Hope (Hepple)**

**Lizzie Holmes**

**Lisbeth Simm**

Plus: Lizzie Holmes and Lisbeth Simm (no found photographs)

[illegible]

# PERFORMANCES WITH LIVE MUSIC

**Asunder sheet music**



**Conductor Hugh Brunt**



**Asunder premiere programme**



**Rehearsals and recording at Sage Gateshead**




**Asunder team with Royal Northern Sinfonia**



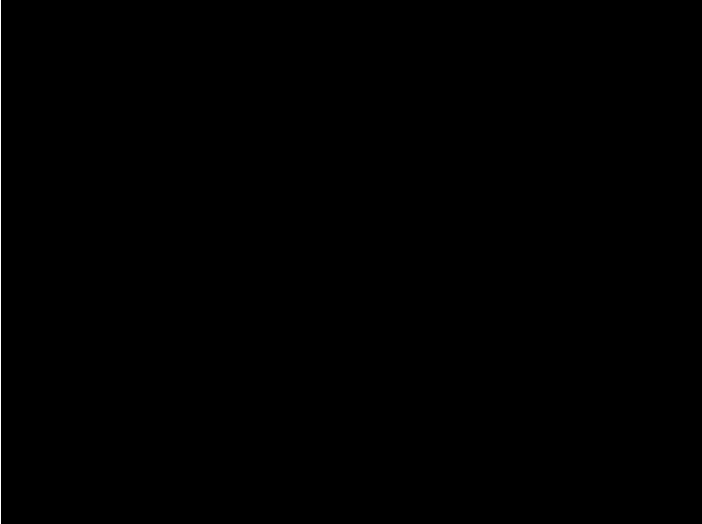
**Performances with Live Music**

**PREMIERE – 10.07.16**  
**Sunderland Empire Theatre**  
 Premiere included additional  
*Asunder* inspired arts activities

**Barbican London**  
 12.02.17



**Asunder**  
 Sun 12 Feb, Milton Court  
 Field Music and Warm  
 Digits provide the live  
 soundtrack to Esther Johnson's  
 moving documentary about  
 Sunderland during WW1



# ARCHIVE RESEARCH











## STUDIO RESEARCH


**Themes of Archive Film**



**Mapping Timeline for Film and events in 1916**



**Search for Ghost Signs**

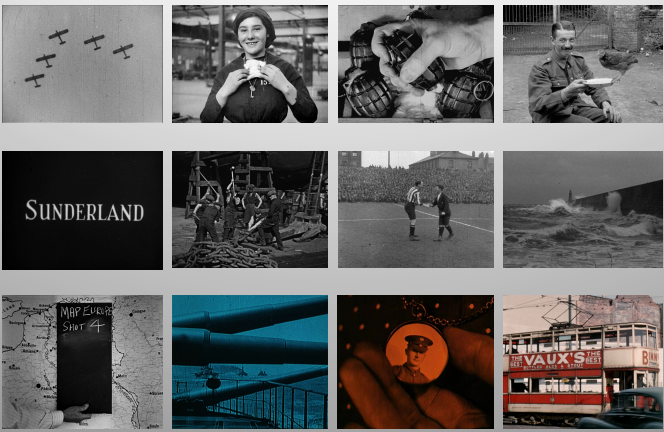


**Textural Visual Research**



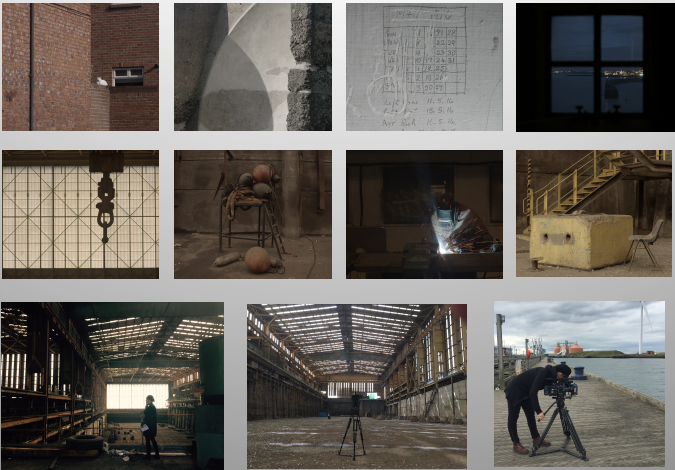
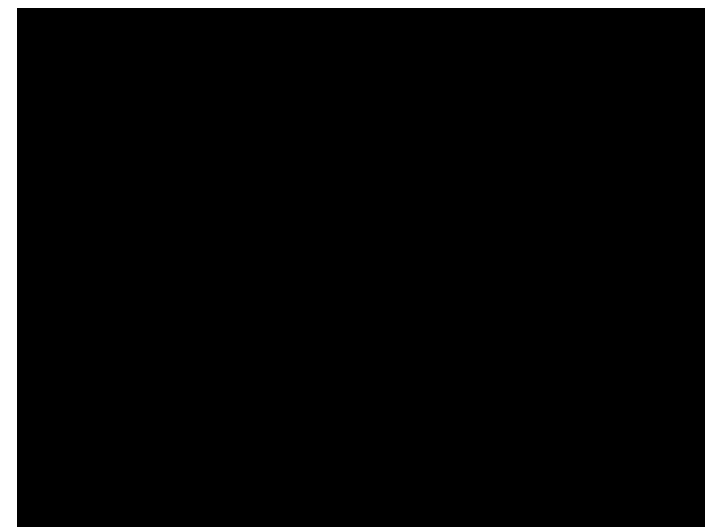
## ARCHIVE FILM

90+ archive films used from 4 film archives



## CONTEMPORARY FILM

locations in the North East as they are now



## COMMUNITY SCREENINGS

Screenings taking place in locations in which the film characters once lived and knew:

e.g. Sunderland; Roker; Hendon; Blyth;  
South Tyneside; Gateshead; Newcastle; Durham

## CINEMA SCREENINGS

- Special screenings for schools
- Screenings with Q&As

## 2018 SCREENINGS

Have included:

- The Women's Library, LSE
- International Women's Day
- Sheffield Museums

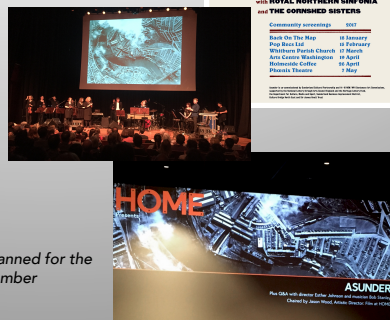
Late 2018:

- Sage Gateshead

a performance with live music is planned for the  
WW1 Armistice Centenary in November

- BBC Broadcast
- DVD release

<http://asunder1916.uk/events>



## PREMIERE AUDIENCE FEEDBACK

"In the plethora of events marking the centenary of the First World War and especially the Somme, *Asunder* really stood out for me: its highly imaginative concept, brilliant storytelling, geographical and cultural specificity, above all its power to move and connect with the reality of events 100 years ago. A fantastic piece of work." – Michael Chaplin, Writer

"The film was meticulously researched and put together to evoke so many emotions, what a tribute... I think the resounding set of applause at the end of the show said it all!" – Vicky Willis, Sir James Knott Trust

"*Asunder* was phenomenal!"  
– Brenda Graham, Sunderland Heritage Forum

"I thought it was amazing and loved every minute. The stories were so lovely and left you wanting to find out more – faultless."  
– Louise Clamp, Sunderland Vibrancy Group

"The show was incredibly moving and powerful, I was very emotional at points."  
– Lynne Patience, Sunderland resident

## REVIEWS

"a fascinating kaleidoscope"  
– *Chronicle* ★★★★★

"very special indeed"  
– *Living North*

"*Asunder* casts its spell"  
– *Sunderland Echo*

"*Asunder* is a powerful fusion of the historical with the contemporary, a lyrical work that lingers long in the imagination"  
– *Morning Star*

"Montage shots of residential streets, the remnants of industry and shipbuilding, relics of the conflict itself, fashion a meticulous mosaic of themed segments, captured with Johnson's trademark painterly eye for detail"  
– *Culture Vulture*

## AWARDS

Nominated for Learning on Screen BUFVC 2018  
*Archive Award*

Nominated for BAFTSS 2018  
*Best Experimental Practice Research Portfolio Award*

WINNER of Journal Culture 2017  
*Best Event of the Year*

Nominated for Focal International 2017  
*Best Use of Footage in a Factual Production*

Shortlisted for Living North 2016  
*Performance of the Year*

[asunder1916.uk](http://asunder1916.uk)  
@1916asunder

[blanchepictures.com](http://blanchepictures.com)  
[esther@blanchepictures.com](mailto:esther@blanchepictures.com)